Thomas Merton, *Opening the Bible*

[T]he Bible raises the question of identity in a way no other book does. As [Karl] Barth pointed out: when you begin to question the Bible you find that the Bible is also questioning you. **When you ask: “What is this book?” you find that you are also implicitly being asked: “Who is this that reads it?”** … common reactions are boredom, mystification, a sense that one has suddenly got lost, and even the onset of sleep. Everyone is likely to have trouble with the Bible, even the believer—perhaps especially the believer….

Someone like Dietrich Bonhoeffer can frankly admit his difficulty, and he did so even when he was facing death in prison. Such admissions are healthy. They clear the air a little for the rest of us.

I am going through another spell of finding it difficult to read the Bible. I never know quite what to make of it. I don’t feel guilty at all about it, and I know it won’t be long before I return to it again with renewed zest. Is it just a psychological process? I am almost inclined to think so . . . True, there is always a danger of indolence, but it would be wrong to get fussed about it. Far better to trust that after wobbling a bit the compass will come to rest in the right direction (Prison Letters).

This unusual capacity of a serious believer to accept without guilt a temporary repugnance for the Bible is in fact very revealing. The truth is that the surface of the Bible is not always even interesting. And yet when one does finally get into it, in one way or other, when one at last catches on to the Bible’s peculiar way of saying things, and even more to the things that are said, one finds that he is no longer simply questioning the book but being questioned by it….

Many religious books have approached this question in many different ways. In Zen Buddhism, which is definitely not a religion of books, there is a mondo, a kind of basic existential question, that springs out of a dialog between master and disciple, and which remains for the disciple to solve by personal struggle. It goes like this: the disciple goes to his Master and asks: “Who is the Buddha?” The Master replies: “Who are you?”